

PLENARY MEETING

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Report by the Secretary-General

ITU EXPERIENCE WITH REMOTE PARTICIPATION AND PROPOSED ACTION PLAN - RESOLUTION 167 (GUADALAJARA, 2010)

Summary

The Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union, in Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010), “instructs the Secretary-General, in consultation and collaboration with the Directors of the Bureaux to develop an action plan, to be considered by the Council at its 2011 session, for electronic participation in its working groups and related meetings that report to the Council, including the use of tools such as videoconferencing; to build upon trials for electronic meetings, in collaboration with the Directors of the Bureaux, such that their subsequent implementation is technologically neutral, to the greatest extent possible, and cost effective, in order to allow broad participation satisfying the necessary security requirements ...”.

Council 2014 agreed that, with respect to “Strengthening ITU capabilities for electronic meetings and means to advance the work of the Union”:

- 1 The remote participation pilot phase should continue by improving and increasing the remote participation services; and
- 2 A detailed report on the legal, technical and financial challenges be prepared and presented to PP-14, including how to address the concerns of people with special needs or disabilities, and the issues related to the equal use of languages.

Action required

The Plenipotentiary is invited to consider this report and decide on the direction for the future, considering the procedural changes that would be required for remote participation to be institutionalized.

References

[Resolution 167 \(Guadalajara, 2010\)](#); Council Documents [C11/37\(Rev.1\)](#), [C12/21\(Rev.1\)](#), [C13/INF/8](#), [C13/20\(Rev.1\)](#), and [C14/20](#).

Background

1. Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010) instructs the Secretary-General, with the involvement of the advisory groups of the three Sectors, to further expand the electronic working methods to include remote/electronic participation. Electronic participation should be extended to ITU working groups as well as the meetings that report to the Council.
2. The piloting of remote participation as a service in ITU is now in its fourth year. Four reports have been provided to the Council showing the evolution and the challenges encountered in the implementation.
3. Remote participation has been provided in over 1,300 meeting sessions, with more than 10 000 remote participants, over the last four years.
4. Details on usage by the various Bureaux and by developed/developing countries were published in the last report to the Council¹.
5. The WTDC-14 Draft Final Report requested “To the extent possible and practicable, study groups and their relevant groups shall endeavour to use remote participation technologies as part of efforts to encourage and enable broader participation in the work of the study groups by all Member States, Sector Members, Associates and Academia, especially for persons with special needs, such as persons with disabilities”.

Technical and legal challenges

6. The following table gives the two major technical issues, the potential consequences and the related legal issues.

Table 1: Technical Issues and subsequent legal challenges

<p>Technical Issue 1: Quality of voice/sound using public infrastructure to connect remote participants (not under ITU control).</p>
<p>Consequences: No interpretation possible by interpreters of remote interventions.</p>
<p>Mitigation options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No interpretation (Floor channel only). - Postpone the remote intervention (try to improve quality – not under ITU control). - Cancel the remote intervention. - Intervention by Proxy.
<p>Legal issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot guarantee language requirements for meetings. - Cannot guarantee equal rights of remote and on-site participants.
<p>Modifications to the legal framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modify, if necessary, Article 31 of the Convention (Credentials for Conferences) to cover the eventuality of a last-minute technical impediment to remote participation that might require a transfer of powers at the very last minute. - Potential impact on Article 29 of the Constitution (Languages).

¹ See Document C14/20 - Appendices 1 and 2.

<p>Technical Issue 2: Failure of communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Technical failure between meeting location and remote participant.- Deliberate interruption in communication to disturb the proceedings.
<p>Consequences: No intervention possible by the remote delegate(s).</p>
<p>Mitigation options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Stop the meeting or wait until connection becomes available.- Proceed without the remote delegate(s).- Intervention by Proxy.
<p>Legal issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cannot guarantee availability and confidentiality of communication using public infrastructure which is not under ITU control.- Cannot guarantee equal rights between remote and on-site participants.- Impossibility for remote participants of exercising certain intrinsic rights of plenary participants such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The right to express an opinion fully and freely on the subject under discussion;• The right to submit orally any proposal or amendment;• The right to raise a point of order or submit a motion of order;• The right to participate in a vote;• The right to oppose the formation of a consensus.
<p>Modifications to the legal framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Need to amend provisions of the Union's legal texts relating to the quorum.- Modification of procedures for submitting motions of order and raising points of order.- Modification of rules on voting owing to the fact that voting by show of hands and secret ballots are physically impossible in the case of remote participation.- Repercussions with regard to the rules governing the interruption of votes in the event of a lost connection.- Need to ensure that, in the case of treaty-making conferences, delegations participating remotely are nevertheless in possession of valid credentials. Modification of Article 31 of the Convention should not be ruled out in this regard.- Impossibility in practice of carrying out the functions of chairman, since a remote participant is unable, for practical reasons, to perform all the duties of the chairman.- Impossibility in practice of participating in certain statutory committees such as credentials committees or editorial committees.

Accessibility

7. The remote participation and improved audio-visual infrastructure in the meeting rooms have facilitated inclusion of people with special needs in line with the ITU policy on accessibility adopted in 2013 by providing:

- Captioning for those with hearing impairments
- Audio conferencing for the visually impaired
- Multiple audio channels for supporting the six UN official languages plus floor
- Web conferencing for those with mobility challenges

8. ITU continues to keep abreast of technological innovations that can improve accessibility (e.g. speech recognition, screen readers, machine interpretation).

Cost

9. In 2011, the Council was requested to approve a one-time capital investment of CHF 1,721,000 for upgrading ITU meeting rooms and integrating interpretation, and a further CHF 875,000 per annum for operational expenses². Of those amounts, Council approved, in the budget for 2012-2013, CHF 675,000 for the one-time investment and CHF 690,000 for biennial operational expenses³. The amount approved for the one-time investment allowed for the upgrading of some meeting rooms and the amount approved for operational expenses covered two junior staff positions. As a result of the shortfall between the amounts requested and the amounts approved, it was not possible to upgrade all meeting rooms and interpretation facilities. Those rooms that have not yet been upgraded cannot fully support remote participation.

10. With remote participation services now being offered in an increasing number of ITU meetings, there is a need for additional meeting rooms to be upgraded. The previously requested amounts of CHF 875,000 for annual operational expenditure and the original CHF 1,721,000 for capital investment remain valid. Therefore, an increase of CHF 1,060,000 for operational expenses should be included in the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 biennial budgets and the remainder of the one-time capital investment of CHF 1,046,000 should be included in the 2016-2017 budget (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Additional budgetary implications for remote participation services

	2016-2017	2018-2019
Operational expenses	CHF 1 060 000	CHF 1 060 000
Capital investment	CHF 1 046 000	

The way forward

11. The Plenipotentiary Conference is invited to:

- Recognize the significant benefits that this service has offered to delegates (reduced travel cost and time), improved inclusiveness in ITU meetings, conferences and events, and substantial reductions in carbon emissions.
- Note the current technical, financial and legal challenges for adopting remote participation on an equal footing with on-site participation in meetings and events.
- Instruct the secretariat to continue piloting remote participation taking into consideration the rapid evolution in communications and technological tools to improve quality, availability and accessibility.
- Request the Council to review at its next session in 2015 the remote participation pilot which will be in its fifth year.

² See Draft Budget of the Union for 2012-2013 - Document C11/10(Add.1) (Section D, UMACs) and ITU experience with remote participation and proposed action plan - Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010) – (Document C11/37(Rev.1)).

³ See Resolution 1337 – Biennial Budget of the ITU for 2012-2013 (Document C11/105).